

The Foster College of Business Administration: Redefining Education in Illinois

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“Business is the foundation of society.” Robert Baer, the Dean of Bradley University’s Foster College of Business Administration, uttered these words. It is true that today’s world would crumble without business. It is for that reason, among others, that it is necessary for the next generation of CEO’s and businesspersons to be educated at a collegiate level. Because of the state of the art educations available, the next generation will have the best education of any to date and conditions will keep improving. Since 1920, the quality of business education in central Illinois has changed dramatically, due to the establishment of Bradley University’s Business Administration School, now known as the Foster College of Business Administration.

During the 1870s and the 1880s, the business world was turned upside down by the Industrial Revolution. The country rapidly evolved into an industrial nation. Central Illinois felt the effects of this revolution; many companies developed during this time that changed the face of the state and country. Small companies, often led by uneducated leaders, had to fight to survive. The Industrial Revolution also influenced the way businesses ran. By the 1890s the business world had become pressure filled and stressful. Many situations including mergers and acquisitions added to the pressure. As a result, the need formed for educated leaders who knew how to deal with this pressure. During this time laborers united and formed labor unions. These changes, along with other factors, laid the foundation for the establishment of business schools.

Many factors made the need for business schools more obvious. Before the late 1890s the need for the establishment of business schools was not evident. However, when companies expanded, the heads of the companies realized that running large corporations was a difficult task; hence, the need for managers and leaders with a collegiate education was finally seen. After many fruitless attempts beginning in 1881, these needs were addressed when Wharton School of Finance, was formed in 1897. The trend caught on and forty-six percent of all universities had business schools by the end of World War II. The University of Chicago business school was one of and, before 1920, the nearest to Peoria. There was no business education in central Illinois until 1920, when Bradley's Department of Business opened.

When the Department of Business at Bradley opened, it was a small two-year program with only one full-time instructor, a man by the name of Loyal G. Tillotson. Three years later it became a four-year program. That same year the school was renamed the Department of Business Administration and Economics, and Loyal G. Tillotson was named the first dean. After World War II, the enrollment increased exponentially. As a result, the school was reorganized into four parts: Economics, Accounting, Marketing and Retailing, and General Business. Reorganization took place again in 1950. This time it was the entire university which experienced a massive overhaul. The university was divided into many separate colleges, including the College of Commerce. Also during this time, the Department of Business was renamed the College of Business Administration. In 1994, the school took the name Foster after Tom and Ellen Foster, FCBA alums who gave a sizable donation to the school.

Bradley's College of Business Administration has had a profound impact on central Illinois throughout the last century. It was the first business school in central Illinois, and, in addition, one of the first in the state. Before opening, anyone who was interested in a business education would have had to travel nearly 160 miles north to attend the University of Chicago. This was a considerable inconvenience that could have stopped thousands from receiving a good education. However, Bradley has educated many people very well through the years. Some have supplied the area with many new entrepreneurs, some of whom went on to have a big influence on the local economy. In fact, it has been estimated that about one-third of all graduates from the CBA are from Peoria County and the nine surrounding counties. In total, approximately 11,000 people have graduated from the school. This means that Bradley's CBA has given almost 3,700 central Illinoisans opportunities previously unavailable. These people, in addition to the remaining two-thirds from across the globe, have gone on to be prominent figures in businesses, government, and non-for-profit organizations.

Bradley University offers many courses to its students. By 1949 the school already offered 73 undergraduate courses. Most of these courses were very basic in nature, pertaining to real estate, accounting, and commerce. A year earlier, the university began Masters of Business Administration (MBA) and a Masters of Arts in Economics (MAE). The Masters of Arts was halted in 1963, but the MBA is still offered today. This course brought the first degree in business to central Illinois. In 1978 the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACBS) accredited the university. Since this time, the AACBS has reaffirmed the university's accreditation three times. The award has provided prospective students with ample reason to attend the school, as it is a very

prestigious award. Another draw for students is the high placement rate. The placement rate is the percentage of graduates that go on to be placed in careers. An average of ninety-six percent of the graduates from the school are placed in good jobs. These statistics and awards have increased the prestige and popularity of the FCBA through the years.

The quality of business education in Central Illinois has changed dramatically since 1920, due to the Foster College of Business Administration, formerly the Business Administration School, at Bradley University. The school has provided its graduates with the educations needed to succeed in today's world. These graduates have gone on to change the world for the better in many ways. They've built companies, formed charities, and become successful businesspeople. From day one, Bradley University has helped pour the foundation for today's world. [From Bradley University, "About the Foster College of Business," <http://www.bradley.edu/fcba/about/about.shtml> (Sept. 2, 2005); William A. Clarey, Building Bradley Business; Clare Howard, "Bradley to Offer New Executive MBA," The Journal Star, Mar 21, 2001; Student historian's interview with Robert Baer (Dean of the Business School, Bradley University), Sept. 8, 2005; Paul Uselding, "Management and Education in America: A Centenary Appraisal" <http://www.hnet.org/~business/bhcweb/publications/BEHprint/v010/p0015-p0030.pdf>.(Sept. 8, 2005.]